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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 006474

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: THAI RAK THAI LEADER REPOSITIONING PARTY

REF: BANGKOK 6366 (CHATURON ON POLITICS)

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce, reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) The Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party needs time to consolidate in the wake of the September 19 coup, according to TRT Acting Leader Chaturon Chaiseng. In an October 24 lunch with the Ambassador and EAP DAS John, Chaturon related that TRT would advocate democracy but would not confront the coup leaders. He predicted that Thaksin would not return to Thailand in the near future or seek to run in 2007 elections. TRT continued to see a net increase in its party membership and found widespread support and sympathy in the countryside. Chaturon expected civil society groups, including the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), would press the interim government to meet the one-year deadline for elections. Chaturon viewed the USG as having taken a reasonable stance in support of civil liberties. End Summary.

TRT: CRITIQUING, NOT CONFRONTING

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12. (C) Chaturon Chaiseng, Acting Leader of TRT, explained to the Ambassador and DAS John that he sought to reposition TRT, focusing principally on the advocacy of democracy and civil rights. Nevertheless, Chaturon did not want "confrontation" between TRT and the government; civil society organizations should take the lead in challenging the government and the Council for National Security (CNS), while TRT should simply provide its views from time to time. TRT was revising its platform; the party would then critique the performance of the government, the legislature, and the constitution drafters. TRT remained under scrutiny by the authorities because of its suspected ties to "underground movements." Chaturon noted -- but did not take credit for -- the recent circulation of political leaflets calling for democracy and civil rights.

TRT CONTINUES TO ACQUIRE MEMBERS

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13. (C) Chaturon said he sought to "calm down" some TRT figures who wanted to oppose the CNS actively. He also had to ensure that those who often aired their views to the media would faithfully represent the party's policies. TRT continued to experience a net influx of members; in October, 2,000 people quit from the party, but 5,000 joined as new

members. Even in Bangkok the party acquired 700 new members over the past two weeks, which Chaturon acknowledged as "very strange." Chaturon admitted TRT would likely shrink but could afford to lose some members and nevertheless remain large and influential.

14. (C) TRT retained strong support in Thailand's northern and northeastern regions, Chaturon said. People both appreciated the party's policies and felt sympathetic both to TRT and "especially to Thaksin." Voters had grown accustomed to being able to select their political leader, and they did not appreciate being deprived of that right. Chaturon repeated his prior claim (reftel) that voters in some areas had threatened not to vote for politicians who desert TRT. The Democrat Party and Chart Thai might pick up a few seats in TRT areas, but they would not acquire significant momentum, he predicted.

#### THAKSIN TO STAY ABROAD

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15. (C) Chaturon said it would be unwise for deposed caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to return to Thailand in the near future. Thaksin would not want to return if he were unable to move freely, without being confronted by hecklers or approached by admirers. Chaturon believed Thaksin would "very soon" make it clear that he would not return in the near future, and that he would not seek to become a candidate in the next national elections. (Comment: Despite Chaturon's statements, Bangkok is full of rumors that Thaksin is threatening to return soon. Chaturon says he is not in direct contact with Thaksin and may not be the best source on Thaksin's plans. End Comment.)

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#### CIVIL SOCIETY, ACTIVISTS TO PRESS GOVERNMENT

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16. (C) DAS John asked whether Chaturon foresaw the interim government adhering to its timetable for elections in approximately one year. Chaturon said that the government had no other choice; it would come under increasing pressure from NGOs, intellectuals, and the media. Some anti-Thaksin activists, such as the PAD and especially PAD leader Sonthi Limthongkul, had already begun challenging the CNS adversarially. Chaturon said TRT preferred to let these others remain as the CNS's leading critics, and TRT would not ally itself with other organizations.

#### THE SILVER LINING TO RIGHTS RESTRICTIONS

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17. (C) DAS John solicited Chaturon's view of the USG's stance toward the coup and the interim government. Chaturon said he believed the USG had taken an appropriate position, advocating the lifting of martial law and restoration of civil liberties. Chaturon expressed confidence that the Thai people would work toward restoring democracy, although he questioned whether the resulting system would prove sustainable or just fill another interregnum between coups.

18. (C) Chaturon observed that TRT derived some advantages from the current restrictions, which precluded the party from holding a meeting to select new leadership. It would be better for TRT to form its next Executive Board after the political situation settled down. Then, TRT could attract moderates and pragmatists who might not want to associate with the party at the current moment, when TRT appeared to be in the government's crosshairs.

#### REFLECTING ON THE ANTI-THAKSIN MOVEMENT

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19. (C) Reflecting on the widespread discontent with Thaksin prior to the coup, Chaturon noted some of the activists of

his generation had begun to support extraconstitutional measures to force Thaksin from office. Some, whom Chaturon labeled "anarchists," wanted to see Thaksin gone "at any cost." Chaturon lamented that this sentiment helped pave the way for the coup. He also believed Thaksin had disregarded the extent to which people in royalist circles felt threatened by him. Thaksin's spats with the Privy Council had helped to unite his opponents, giving them common cause. Royalists resented Thaksin's direct contacts with the King, and, consequently, they had spread disinformation about Thaksin. Chaturon also observed that former Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam had often advocated some of the measures for which Thaksin bore subsequent criticism, such as his presiding over an April 2005 ceremony at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha. Chaturon wondered aloud whether Wissanu sought to set Thaksin up for a fall.

BIO NOTES

10. (C) Chaturon noted he first came to know Thaksin when Thaksin served as an advisor to Chaturon's father. Chaturon's father and Thaksin's father had served together in the parliament in 1969. Chaturon related that, when he was a member of parliament from the New Aspiration Party (NAP), he nevertheless participated in the formation of TRT, but he decided to remain with NAP rather than become a TRT member at that time. He said he also had considered forming his own political vehicle in the late 1990s, but it would have been difficult for the party that he would have formed to compete with TRT. Chaturon said he found it difficult to use his political position to make money and then use patronage to build up a faction of legislators. He preferred instead to define himself through his official duties and public relations. Although he had had direct access to Thaksin, he did not see himself as a member of Thaksin's inner circle, and he had not received advance notice from Thaksin of his fate prior to cabinet reshuffles. He often anticipated Thaksin would remove him from the cabinet, in which case he intended to enjoy hobbies such as golf. He also had intended to study Chinese, if he had spare time.

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11. (U) DAS John did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

BOYCE